IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval method for retrieving a 3D model similar to the specified 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored in a database, the method comprising:

displaying a 3D model having a hierarchial structure made of a plurality of subelements, the each subelement corresponding to a unit in human recognition;

specifying a subelement of the 3D model as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of subelements displayed, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation;

acquiring the feature values of the <u>subelement</u> <s>subelements</s> specified as the retrieval key from the database;

acquiring the feature values of the subelements <u>stored as objects to be retrieved in the database</u>;

calculating the similarity between the subelement specified as the retrieval key and subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of the both of the acquired feature values;

sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

displaying a 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting.

2. (Previously Presented) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the hierarchial structure of the 3D model is a tree structure.

3. (Cancelled)

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4. (Previously Presented) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 2, wherein the lowest level of the hierarchial structure of the 3D model is selected when the user first designates one of the plurality of subelements displayed.

5. (Cancelled)

6. (Previously Presented) The 3D model retrieval method according to claim 1, wherein the 3D model has attribute information corresponding to the subelements of the 3D model, and

the displaying the 3D model includes displaying attribute information corresponding to the subelements of the 3D model at the same time.

7-9. (Cancelled)

10. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval system for retrieving a 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored in a database by using various feature values calculated from the selected 3D model, the system comprising:

a display section ~~adapted~~ <u>configured</u> to display a 3D model having a hierarchial structure made of a plurality of subelements corresponding to a unit in human recognition;

a specifying section ~~for specifying~~ <u>configured to specify</u> a subelement of the 3D model as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of subelements displayed, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation;

a retrieval key feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the <u>subelement</u> ~~subelements~~ specified as the retrieval key from the database;

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a retrieval object feature values acquisition section configured to acquire the feature values of the subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database;

a degree-of-similarity computing section configured to calculate the similarity between the subelement specified as the retrieval key and subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the differences of the both of the acquired feature values;

a sorting section for sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

wherein the display section is configured to display the 3D model retrieved based on the result of the sorting.

11. (Currently Amended) A 3D model retrieval system for retrieving a 3D model from a plurality of 3D models stored in a database, the system comprising:

a display means adapted to display a 3D model having a hierarchial structure made of a plurality of subelements corresponding to a unit in human recognition;

a specifying means for specifying a subelement of the 3D model as a retrieval key by allowing a user to designate one of the plurality of subelements displayed, the user being able to change to the level of the hierarchy to which the specification is made with a successive operation;

retrieval key feature values acquiring means for acquiring the feature values of the ~~subelements~~ subelement specified as the retrieval key from the database;

retrieval object feature values acquiring means for acquiring the feature values of the subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database;

degree-of-similarity computing means for calculating the similarity between the ~~the subelements~~ subelement specified by the retrieval key feature values acquisition

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means and subelements stored as objects to be retrieved in the database by evaluating the

differences of the both of the acquired feature values;

a sorting means for sorting the results of the calculation of the similarity; and

wherein the display means is configured to display the the 3D model retrieved

on the result of the sorting.

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